

# Sorcerers with Class

By Skip Williams



Like a wizard, a sorcerer is an arcane spellcaster. Though his selection of spells is more limited than that of a wizard, the sorcerer's ability to choose spells on the fly makes him extremely versatile and quite deadly.

## The Pros and Cons of a Sorcerer

Sorcerers have a natural talent for casting arcane spells, thanks (some say) to the draconic blood flowing in their veins. Whatever their origins, these characters are paradoxes, gaining great tactical flexibility from their mastery of only a limited number of spells.

## Sorcerer Assets

When you chose a sorcerer, you gain access to a small number of arcane spells. When chosen with care, a sorcerer's spells are sufficient to deal with nearly any situation. However, the character has other resources available as well. Below are several assets you have going for you when you play a sorcerer.

- **Winning Ways:** A sorcerer needs to have a high Charisma score because that ability governs his spellcasting. But a high Charisma score also gives him an edge in negotiations.
- **Good Will Saves:** A sorcerer uses the best save progression in the game for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural mental strength helps him resist most effects that fool his mind or assault his spirit, including charms, compulsions, illusions, *fear* effects, and even *inflict* spells.
- **Spells:** The sorcerer's spell list has unmatched breadth and depth, and virtually its whole range is open to him.
- **Spontaneous Spellcasting:** A sorcerer doesn't have a spellbook; instead, he chooses a personal repertoire of spells that he can cast anytime. He does have a daily limit on the number of spells of each level he can cast, but he can freely cast any spell he knows until he reaches that limit. So he doesn't have to guess ahead of time which spells to prepare -- if he needs to cast a particular spell several times in the same day, he can do so.
- **Familiar:** By spending a little cash, a sorcerer can gain a familiar who can serve as a spy, lookout, and general assistant.
- **Fair Weapon Selection:** The sorcerer is proficient only with simple weaponry. Though simple weapons aren't the most deadly ones available, the fact that the sorcerer has access to the whole category gives him more options than most other arcane spellcasters have. That versatility can be a lifesaver if his spells happen to fail him.

## Sorcerer Weaknesses

Sorcerers pay a heavy price for their spellcasting abilities. Here are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a sorcerer character.

- **Low Hit Points:** The sorcerer's 4-sided Hit Dice give him very few hit points.
- **Low Skill Points:** At a mere two skill points per level, most sorcerers don't accumulate many skill ranks, even with quadruple skill points at 1st level.
- **Poor Armor Class:** Because the sorcerer has no proficiency with any kind of armor or shield, he generally has a low Armor Class. The combination of low hit points and low Armor Class makes him extremely vulnerable in physical combat, especially melee. He can use spells and magic items to improve his defense, but doing so makes them less available for other purposes.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** A sorcerer's base attack bonus is +1 per two sorcerer levels, which is the worst in the game. Some sorcerers can dish out lots of damage with their spells, but they don't do well with weapons.
- **Poor Reflex and Fortitude Saving Throws:** Sorcerers have the worst progression for Fortitude and Reflex saves in the game (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Thus, they aren't so great at avoiding attacks on their bodies.
- **Limited Spell Choices:** Once a sorcerer chooses spells, his selection remains more or less fixed, except for new additions as he attains higher levels. He has a limited ability to change his repertoire, but for the most part, he is stuck with whatever spells he has chosen.

## Playing a Classy Sorcerer

Great sorcerers usually use the following techniques. So if you're playing a sorcerer, try to incorporate them into your strategy.

## Stay Flexible

Just because you don't have to choose spells every day doesn't mean you don't have to think ahead. When choosing your personal repertoire of spells, try to make selections that will help you deal with as many different kinds of situations as possible. It's hard to go wrong with spells that deal damage, but try to pick spells that deal different kinds of damage or use different kinds of energy. It might seem like a fun idea to become a "fire sorcerer," but when a red dragon (or some other creature that's immune to fire) comes along, you'll wish you hadn't limited yourself so much. It also pays to know a few spells for travel, defense, and miscellaneous tasks. And because your selection is so limited, try to concentrate on spells that you can use in several different ways. The *polymorph* spell, for example, allows you to assume a variety of forms with which to meet numerous different challenges. The various wall spells can be similarly versatile.

Although you're an arcane spellcaster, spells aren't the only tools you have at your disposal. A few weapons, alchemical items, and other equipment can greatly expand your combat options, so keep an eye out for potential additions to your arsenal.

Because of your low hit points and poor Armor Class, you are among your party's most vulnerable members. So make sure that you have a good place in the party's marching order -- preferably in the middle, so that at least one ally always stands between you and your foes.

## Remember Your Friends

The sheer power you command as a sorcerer can make you cocky. In truth, however, physical attacks can defeat you pretty quickly, so you need to stick close to allies who can protect you. Furthermore, a spell isn't always the best way to solve a problem -- sometimes it's best to let other characters handle the situation in their own ways.

**The Party's Front Line:** Your party's more heavily armored individuals (particularly fighters and paladins) form a fighting line that keeps enemies away from you. So be ready to support them with spells in case they get into trouble. And when casting your spells, be careful to aim them so that your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than misaimed spells that hurt friends as well as foes.

**Other Spellcasters:** You probably aren't the only spellcaster in your party, but you may well have the smallest selection of spells available to you on any given day. So try to make your fellow spellcasters aware of the spells you have so that they can make selections that cover the gaps in your capabilities. If your personal repertoire is primarily offensive, however, don't expect other spellcasters to let you have all the fun blasting the opposition. Instead, work out ways to coordinate your attack spells. Perhaps you and another spellcaster can work together to blanket the opposition with area spells, or perhaps one of you can use area spells while another uses targeted spells to take out the enemy leaders or pick off cripples.

## Some Key Equipment

As a sorcerer, your spells are more important to you than your gear. Nevertheless, a few pieces of the right equipment can make your career longer and happier.

- **Melee Weapon:** You're not much good in melee, but you never know when you'll have to resort to hand-to-hand combat. Thus, you should carry a good melee weapon so that you're not defenseless when your spells run out or fail. A spear deals good damage and can also prove useful in probing surfaces for unseen dangers. A long spear has reach and can help keep foes a little farther away from you.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack spell against some opponents. Use it when necessary to conserve your spells, or when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit their use. You can use either a heavy or a light crossbow, as you choose. The former deals more damage but takes longer to reload. At the beginning of your career, the light crossbow might prove a better choice than the heavy one because you're more likely to find yourself out of other options. But as you gain experience (and money for better equipment), you might prefer to deal more damage with a single shot.
- **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells. Furthermore, you never know when you'll need a particular spell -- and need it very badly. So it pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve via a collection of scrolls, wands, or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry along useful spells (such as *knock*, *dispel magic*, or *remove curse*) that you might not use in every adventure. Best of all, you can make scrolls yourself, though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points. Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, especially attack spells such as *magic missile*, *fireball*, or *lightning bolt*. Furthermore, both scrolls and wands are a great way to expand your spell selection beyond your personal repertoire of spells. If a spell is on the sorcerer/wizard class spell list, you can use it from a scroll or wand even if you don't know how to cast it yourself.

**Skip Williams** keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of *Dragon Magazine* for eighteen years. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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